

INTRODUCTION

Bridging the Digital Divide

The 28th annual IAMSILIC conference was held in Mazatlán, Mexico, 6-11 October, 2002, hosted by the Unidad Académica Mazatlán del Instituto de Ciencias del Mar y Limnología, U.N.A.M. at the Playa Mazatlán Hotel.

The digital divide was chosen as the principal theme for the conference and the Program Committee's choice of the phrase "Bridging the digital divide" was quite deliberate since we wanted more than a list of the causes of the divide. We hoped to hear how these barriers have and can be overcome. Our choice was prompted by some papers on the digital divide in relation to developing countries at the 1998 IFLA conference and the theme for the Oceania section of the 2001 IFLA conference in Boston. There is a burgeoning literature on the subject, although it is not a barrier that only exists for developing countries. There are versions of the digital divide in developed countries and Beth Avery discussed them in her paper presented by Martha Pretorius at the Brest conference in 2001.

Many of the papers and posters presented at the conference were closely aligned to this theme, starting with the paper from our keynote speaker, Dr Meryl Williams, the Director of the World Fish Center (ICLARM). Dr Williams described the uneven advance of information and communications technology (ICT) in developing countries where the divide can be worse for aquatic library and information services since "...aquatic resources, such as fisheries, are often economic activities of the marginal poor and receive little attention". Given that access to the technology can be achieved through focal points and reference centres Dr Williams sees an obligation for IAMSILIC to help ensure that data, information and knowledge are ready in a useable form.

"Bridging solutions" can be found in various papers, for example the paper from Guillermina Cosulich on co-operation in South America, the paper presented by Enrique Canessa on the delivery of free e-journals via email to developing countries and in the paper by Steve Watkins on the IAMSILIC Z30.50 Distributed Library Catalogue, facilitating resource sharing through linked systems.

Irrespective of the conference theme, IAMSILIC's annual conferences provide an opportunity for members to report on new, innovative projects and improvements from their own institutions. Some examples from this conference are Peter Brueggeman's paper on digital library projects at Scripps, Stephanie Haas on geospatially enabling of bibliographic records and Natalie Wiest on service evaluation by the user community.

This is the first time IAMSILIC has had its annual conference in Latin America and there were many delegates from the region. They took advantage of the unique opportunity of having people from Argentina, Chile, Ecuador and Mexico to get together and form a

new regional group in IAMSLIC. We have been moving the location of our conference to different parts of the World other than North America since the 18th conference in Bremerhaven in 1992. In doing so we provide a rare opportunity for members from each of the different regions to attend an IAMSLIC conference where travel costs may otherwise be an impediment.

Although sponsoring delegates is by no means a first, the level of sponsorship for delegates from developing countries was increased this year, in keeping with the Conference theme of “bridging the digital divide”. IOC continued its strong support for the annual conference by funding five of the attendees at the ODINCARSA training course to stay on for the conference. Through Koda Traore, we obtained generous sponsorship for five delegates from Ghana, Mauritania, Micronesia, Palau and the West Indies from CTA (Technical Centre for Agricultural and Rural Cooperation), based in the Netherlands. We also had a one-off grant from the Trust Fund administered by the ASFA Board for a librarian from one of the ASFA input centers in South America. We are very grateful for this amount of support and it achieved what we had hoped for, a wide representation of people from developing countries who gave presentations at the conference.

Next year, after three years away from USA, we return for our 29th conference to Mystic, Connecticut, then to the furthest it has been from its origins, to Hobart in 2004.

I would like to thank all presenters of papers and posters for their contribution to the conference, as well as Jim Markham for editing the proceedings and Jean Collins and Joan Parker for their help as members of the Program Committee.

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